

People's Reporter

A FORUM OF CURRENT AFFAIRS

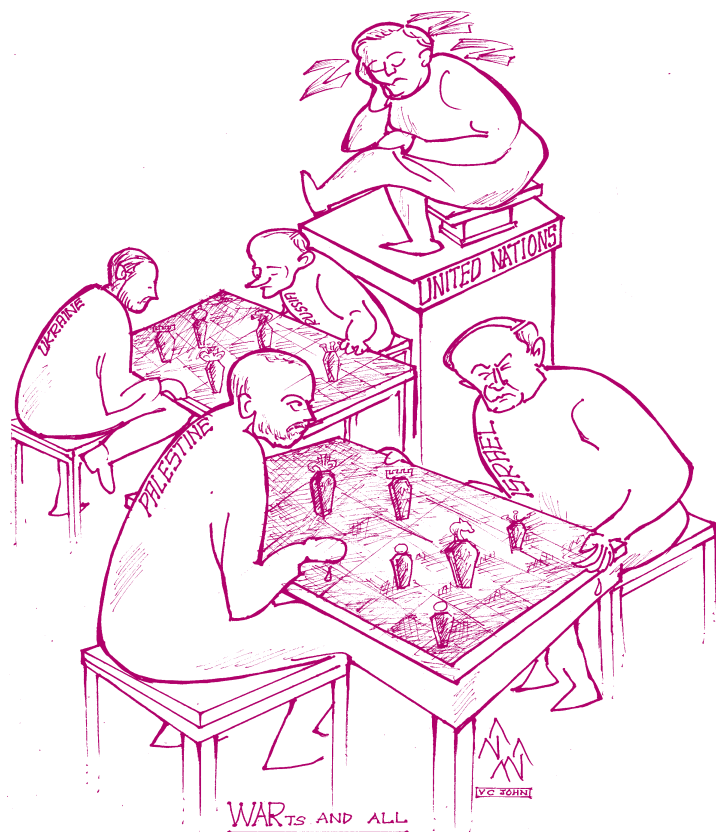
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THEY KILL US FOR THEIR SPORT!!



World Council
of Churches

Thursdays in Black

Leaders of the World Council of Churches (WCC), by becoming Thursdays in Black ambassadors, are acting and speaking out for a world free from rape and violence.

WCC general secretary Rev. Prof Dr Jerry Pillay, in a video released on 26 Oct. explained why he became an ambassador. "Sexual abuse and violence based on a person's gender or vulnerability should have no place on our streets, in our homes, schools, workplaces, and worship communities," Pillay said. "From growing up in South Africa to now serving as the general secretary of the World Council of Churches, I have seen the personal tragedies and the community and societal impact of sexual and gender-based violence."

In the coming weeks, the Moderator and Vice Moderators of the WCC Central Committee will share their vision and commitment to ending gender-based violence. Bishop Dr Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, Moderator of the WCC Central Committee, says that the Thursdays in Black campaign is "a witness to Jesus Christ". "The issue can hardly be overestimated. Sexual violence against women and children is a burning issue, especially for the churches," he said. "It is a topic still swept under the rug in societies and, sometimes, especially in churches. What should not be, cannot be." Rev. Merlyn Hyde Riley, general secretary

of the Jamaica Baptist Union and vice moderator of the WCC central committee, commented that she became an ambassador to stop gender-based violence from denying human dignity. "I'm really proud to be an ambassador in the fight against gender-based violence. I find gender-based violence to be extremely concerning because it is so pervasive and so destructive", she said. — **WCC News**

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In the context
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in the land of the Holy-One,
which side do you support?



World Communion
of Reformed Churches

Decade for Climate Justice

**Deepen the understanding
of the interconnections
between economics, ecology, and theology**

"Amid the devastating environmental crisis, we recognize that there is also an opportunity for the churches to engage in God's mission to witness our faith. At the same time, there is a call for the Church to revisit our faith and practices to get into a covenant weaving the web of God's life,"

A consultation of theologians, church leaders, and activists, was held at Depok, Indonesia, from 19 to 21 October 2023, as part of the World Communion of Reformed Churches' (WCRC) Decade for Climate Justice. The consultation called upon all the concerned to deepen the understanding of the interconnections between economics, ecology, and theology — noting that the starting point must be with "those who are left out and those who are being crucified," including Indigenous people and non-human creation.

"Amid the devastating environmental crisis, we recognize that there is also an opportunity for the churches to engage in God's mission to witness our faith. At the same time, there is a call for the Church to revisit our faith and practices to get into a covenant weaving the web of God's life," noted the introduction to a statement on "Faith, Economy, Ecology", brought out by the participants.

"We need to build our capacity, partnering with theological institutions, social justice movements, and organizations, dialogue with scientists

and grassroots leaders of Black and Indigenous peoples, women, small farmers, and the youth and others. Their voices will lead us to the systemic solutions necessary to avoid a climate and humanitarian catastrophe. They know the structures that oppress, destroy the system of life, and the changes that can make a positive impact on people's lives and the Earth. The gifts of the Spirit present in the Church today more than ever have a role to play in the healing of Creation", concluded the statement.

"The earth and the oceans are relentlessly mined, and forests are logged while the resultant pollution is released into the air, the oceans, the rivers, and the land. The ideologies of consumerism have legitimized this endless loop into the only way of being, participation, and meaning. We are literally consuming ourselves and the rest of the planet to death!" said Philip Vinod Peacock, WCRC Executive Secretary for Justice and Witness, in an address at the consultation.

"We might be aware that wealthy nations and sectors are mainly responsible for historical green house gas emissions. But it is important to note that the wealthy contribute disproportionately to the climate crisis not only through their high-consumption lifestyles but also and especially as investors and wealth holders who own, control, shape, and financially profit from carbon-intensive production processes," said Athena Peralta, Programme Executive for Economic and Ecological Justice, of the World Council of Churches.

In 2022, the WCRC Executive Committee declared a Decade for Climate Justice. A planning committee drew up a programme for the first five years under the theme, "Learning from the Earth: Witnessing to Climate Justice." The consultation worked to provide for the theological and ideological underpinnings of the decade and to provide directions for the future.

"Religion, economy, and ecology are

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The UN in deep slumber?

The UNO was formed in 1945 with the main objective of making life of the people safe and secure by preventing wars in the world. However, it is in a bad predicament that this 193 – nation organisation has been remaining all these years as a mute spectator to the growing armed conflicts and casualties across the world. As per a study by Uppsala University, the world witnessed 285 armed conflicts since 1946. Findings of the Global Research show that after the second World War, the US made 37 military interventions and killed 2 million people, excluding the interventions and death toll in Lebanon, Syria, Libya and Yemen recently. Deputy Secretary of the UN observes that people's sense of safety and security is at an all time low in almost every country and 2 billion people live in places affected by conflicts.

This situation attests the disturbing failure of the UN in preventing armed conflicts and bringing peace in the world. The fresh outbreak of war between Israel and Hamas, a non-state entity, since 7 October, caused the death of nearly 12000 people by the end of October and destruction of countless buildings including hospitals and other infrastructures in Gaza and Israel. The attack of Hamas on Israel on 7 October is the reason for the ongoing war in Gaza. At the same time, while condemning Hamas for this, one has to admit that the statement of Mr. Antonio Guterres, Secretary General of the UN in the General Assembly, that the attack of Hamas did not take place in a vacuum, to be true. One cannot ignore the fact that the intermittent occupation of Palestinian land by the Zionists since 1948, is the cause of making this region a permanent scene of war.

In order to put an end to this situation and provide peace and security to the Israelites and Palestinians we cannot re-write historical facts. Acceptance of Palestine as a State by Israel and putting an end to further occupation of Palestinian land as per the Oslo Agreement of 1993 would be the reasonable solution to this problem. There is no justification for Israel and her allies for not implementing this Agreement. The inability of the UN to enforce the implementation of this Agreement is really sad. This situation keeps the question about meaningful relevance of the UN loud and disturbing. The failure of the UN to enforce the resolution urging a cease-fire in Gaza, passed in the General Assembly with 120 nations supporting and only 14 nations opposing, further attests the incapability of this world organisation.

The justification of Israeli occupation on Palestinian land, given by Israel's Ambassador in the UN General Assembly holding the Bible in his hand, is all the more disturbing. His proclamation that Israel is bound to obey the Bible and not international laws and protocols on human rights, is very ominous. If other nations also say that they are bound to obey their scriptures the principles of nation states and rule of law will give way to the principles of religious states of the Dark Ages. It is unfortunate that this issue is not taken seriously both at the UN forums and in the media.

These signals of the collapse of human civilisation call for a serious re-look on the objectives, structure and rules of the UN to ensure that it becomes an effective organisation to ensure peace, security and dignity to the people across the world.

Thought for the Fortnight

*We look forward to the time, when
The Power of Love
will replace
The Love of Power.
Then will our world know
the Blessings of Peace.
– William E. Gladstone*

Non Controversial Platform

For Sharing The Gospel

Daniel Premkumar

For you O God, love all things that exist
And detest none of the things
That you have made
For you would not have created
Anything if you hated it!

A. Church's Primary Task is to Share the Good News of Jesus

The important question is what methods are we employing to communicate the Gospel?

India, today, has become intolerant, and in some cases even violent, against Servants of God sharing the Gospel. We hear more and more such instances, pouring in from the four corners of the country. Before crying hoarse against people of other faiths, of late, they have become intolerant towards other faiths. Let us self examine why they have become so whether the methods we use to communicate the gospel are insensitive to the sentiments and feelings of other faith communities.

The following are the traditional methods of communicating the Gospel from olden times:

Tracts Distribution:

Most of the tracts are printed abroad with no clue to the whole Eco-sphere of the recipient country where it is being distributed. Tracts have been distributed with slightest regard to Hindu festival days and at pilgrim centres. Surely, we have Constitutional right to propagate and practise our faith. No wonder, the recipients are deeply hurt to impose an alien faith distributed in sacred spaces they hold with veneration.

Street Preaching

Traditionally, evangelists have used hand mikes to propagate how God of the Bible and Jesus are superior to all other local gods. This also raises negative response these days from the recipient hearers.

Crusades

The terminology itself spells a war cry with the intention of conquering other people and their gods. Today, even this method is also losing favour from people of other faiths.

Electronic Media – T V and Radio

The viewers are free to flip channels and escape the of preacher's attacks on their own



Rev. Dr. Daniel Premkumar is a 'Pastor to the Farmers'. He is the Founder of the Life Giving Agricultural (LGA) Centre, at Malapalle Village, Kurnool Dt., Andhra Pradesh. And also the Home for HIV Infected or Affected Children, Adoni

personal religion.

Revival Meetings

These have become more Revival Meetings for Christian audience rather than Gospel sharing with people of other faiths. Preacher after preacher, normally from other parts of India and abroad, on the dais are totally oblivious to local sentiments and faith traditions.

Prison Ministry

Surely, we have a captive audience depending on the permission of the Jailor but unfortunately, such interventions only leave an impression with the inmates that Good News of Jesus are only mere words without any deeds. It doesn't empathize with their anxiety concerning their legal status and court proceedings and more importantly, the fate of the members of their families, especially about growing children, the stigma they suffer etc. The Good News of Jesus does not touch any of these elements except Sin and Salvation!

B. Sharing the Good News through Christian Service Institutions

Christian Missionaries over the last 2 centuries have initiated innumerable Service Institutions to share values of the kingdom like equality that breaks through the culture of inequality that pervades gender, caste, class, region, language. Surely, these

institutions have brought education and empowerment to the women, the untouchables and the tribal communities, who otherwise would never have seen the light of day. This also brought reversal effect in social profile as more and more Depressed Classes began to seize opportunities given and rise above in the social ladder. This has also brought the excluded, stigmatized communities to access opportunities in education and economic upliftment.

Some of these service institutions are –

Christian Colleges and Schools

Orphanages

Old age Homes

Drop in Center for HIV and other stigmatized populations

Day Care centre etc,

C. All through, Hospitals are singularly welcomed by one and all

Christian hospitals are serving the poor with the compassion of Jesus, in this country for the last 200 years with the least resistance. All together, 1,000 Mission Hospitals were started all over the country but, for many reasons their numbers have come down. Half of them are on the brink of closure. This is so because they cannot compete with the Corporate Health Industry and also because of the stringent Government Policies which stifle the survival of such charity hospitals.

It is in this dismal scenario, that **Health Enablers Training Program** by Christian Medical College, Vellore (RUHSA), has gained importance and prominence today. For they have trained a record number of **1,70,000** Health Enablers in the last **200** years. And these Health Enablers are ministering in remotest corners of the country as Barefoot Evangelists and Health Enablers.

That is why we propose that when a Pastor's wife is trained as Health Enabler she can open

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15th General Assembly Christian Conference of Asia



'God, Restore Us in Your Spirit And Renew the Creation'

Jerry Pillay

Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillay, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, delivered the keynote address on the theme "God, Renew Us in Your Spirit, and Restore the Creation", of the 15th General Assembly of the CCA held at Kottayam, Kerala, India from 28 Sept. to 3 Oct. 2023.

Second part of excerpts from the keynote address

3. Theological Perspectives

We can link many theological themes to climate change and why Christians should take this seriously. I will address three aspects in this section.

3.1. God and Creation

The very first chapter of the Genesis makes it clear that God is the creator of the world. The universe was freely created from nothing out of the benevolence of God and that "God saw

On the basis of our Christian interpretations of creation, incarnation, and the Spirit, biophysical realities have great moral significance. They are worthy of appropriate care and concern. Material needs are not to be denied or transcended. Contempt for the material or biophysical is a false spirituality. There must be no indifference to hunger, poverty, and disease; human physical well-being matters! Nor should there be any neglect of ecological integrity.

everything that he had made, and, indeed, it was very good." (Gen. 1:31). Psalm 8 establishes that God set the "moon and stars in place" and gave the human person care and consideration. Psalm 24:1 tells us quite emphatically that "the earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it, for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters."

These verses not only tell us that, as Creator, this is God's world but it also speaks about the character of the Creator. Creation is an expression of God's divine grace and faithful loving kindness. Creation is not controlled by the power of a blind fate, but by the word of God. Hence, it discloses at the same time the grace of God that is made manifest in the gift of



Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillay is the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches

freedom and creativity given to the human person.

Creation is also an expression of God's goodness in that it is "good" - in fact, "very good", according to Genesis 1 (NRSV). It is good, apart from human values (Ps. 104) and

independent of human interests. It is good not in the sense that evil is absent, which it clearly is not, but in the sense that the creation is an expression of the goodness of the Creator, that it is intensely valued by God in all its moral ambiguity, that it functions in accord with the divine design, that it is an appropriate habitat for humanity and all other beings in our interdependent relationships, and that it serves God's redemptive purposes for all created beings. Thus, God values biophysical reality and the needs of every form of life, human and otherwise. The planet has been created as a habitat to be shared by all. God's compassionate concern covers the whole and this concern is extended to human beings.

Genesis 3 establishes that the fall of man affected not only the relationship between God and human beings but all of creation as well. This affirmation of the biophysical is prominent also in the doctrines of the incarnation and the presence of the Spirit as in the incarnation "the Word became flesh and lived among us" (John 1: 14, NRSV). In the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, we have encountered the saving Christ. The incarnation confers dignity not only on humanity but on everything with which humanity is united in the biophysical interdependence. The incarnation opens the eye of faith to a new vision of the whole.

Moreover, in the church's experience of the Spirit, the world is filled with the glory of God (Isa. 6:3; Ps. 19:1; Eph. 4:6). God is not only beyond but in the creation as the vivifying, reconciling, liberating, and sanctifying presence of the Spirit.

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Non Controversial Platform

For Sharing The Gospel

>>> Contd. from Page 2 Col. 1 up many new opportunities for sharing the gospel.

RUHSA, with her 16 sub centers spread all over the country, stands firm in their vision and commitment to deliver effectively the healing ministry of Jesus with minimum institutional costs.

D. Jesus, in his Earthly days, was Concerned with both Sickness and Hunger

100 years ago Missionaries were concerned about the Food Security for the poorest so they focused on Agriculture and initiated KASAM Agricultural Institute, Katpadi, TN; Agricultural Centre near Dharapuram, Tamilnadu and Higginbottom University of Agriculture in Prayag Raj UP. But, unfortunately the Old-Line churches did not care much about the peasantry who were mostly illiterate. Generally speaking, for the Church leadership based in cities, neither food security nor Dalit Christian Farming Community, in village churches does not matter much.

Only recently, there is a reversal of priorities in the global agrarian world. People becoming conscious of their health, are choosing premium chemical-free farm produce.

100 years ago Missionaries were concerned about the Food Security for the poorest so they focused on Agriculture and initiated KASAM Agricultural Institute, Katpadi, TN; Agricultural Centre near Dharapuram, Tamilnadu and Higginbottom University of Agriculture in Prayag Raj UP. But, unfortunately the Old-Line churches did not care much about the peasantry who were mostly illiterate.

Hence, Organic/ Sustainable agriculture has become the new normal for both the city-dwellers and village farmers. This is a Win-Win situation both for the small farmers and for the Main-line churches by promoting Creation Friendly Agriculture with minimum chemical residuals. Both urban and village churches, the producers and the consumers opt for poison free food chain. They are openly affirming the Wellness of the Planet Earth & Climate Justice. Church also begins to own the challenges and the travails of rural agrarian faith communities.

Secondly, Church also affirms those portions of the Scriptures related to heaven and earth which made little sense till now. Suddenly the church becomes life-affirming. The entire church now can re-read the Bible through the eyes of the Peasants engaged in creation-friendly agriculture (Psalm 42.1, Revelation 4.11).

E. LGA Center

To be obedient to the above vision, we initiated Life Giving Agriculture Centre at Malapalle Village, Mantralayam Mandal, Kurnool District - 518 313, to prove to the marginal farmers

that it is possible to practise chemical-free agriculture and break-even financially as well !

All along we believe that only humans carry the Image of God (Gen 1.26), the Creator God bestowed at the time of creation, It is not so, because

a. Rev 4.11 states that all living things were created with divine will and share Creator God's unique attribute (HAYA).

F. First Bible Beckons all believers to Protect and Nourish the Creation

According to the Bible the entire creation is called as first

Bible by St.Paul (Rom 1.20).

Ever since the creation of the world, His eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things He has created.

Wisdom of Solomon 11.24 from (Catholic Canon)

For you O God, love all things that exist

And detest none of the things

That you have made

For you would not have created

Anything if you hated it!

G. People of other faiths welcome the following from Christian Community

Remember that People of other faiths are no longer objects to be converted but are partners in protecting planet earth.

Christians should eliminate the use of the words like **Heathen, Alien** from their dictionary

Start cultivating harmless traditions like rearing ('Basil Plants' - Considered Olive of India).

Mutual learning and appreciation from each other, sacred Scriptures, on best practices in promoting sustainable agriculture.



One who is branded as
'FORWARD'
Usually ends up as a
FROWARD!



15th General Assembly Christian Conference of Asia



Strengthen the profile of churches as actors for eco-social transformation

Dietrich Werner

Second part of excerpts from the paper presented at a 15th CCA Assembly Pre-Consultation held at Kottayam, India, on 26 September 2023

2) Internationalizing diaconia and the critical discourse on the "development paradigm" after the Second World War – growing engagement for issues related to the Sustainable Development Goals

Some would argue that internationalizing diaconia, social and medical care became a feature only with the emergence of the modern and interconnected world in the 20th century, when Diaconia became officially called "ecumenical diaconia".⁷ But this is not the case and is only partly true. It is obvious already in apostolic times of the Early Christianity that there was a realization already of a global dimension of churches' social responsibility. Due to a global, i.e. ecumenical

The specific diaconal language, the language of care, of compassion, of love, of counselling and of sensitivity to suffering remains indispensable both in the past and today. In the specific diaconal language always the three concepts of *dignity* (in the image of God), *justice* (for the marginalized) and *stewardship* (for suffering creation) are interrelated and always play a role.

understanding of church unity, churches wanted to respond already to situations of need in the far distance.

Read again the examples of the collect for Jerusalem ((1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8:1-9:15; Rom 15:14-32) and also the case of the famine in Judea (Acts 11:27-29) which became the occasion of the first action of humanitarian aid for people in the far distance. It is remarkable also that Religious Orders already in the early Medieval period formed a transnational network of dedicated hospitals. Specific mention can be made of the congregation of the Antonites, which was related to the Abbey of St. Antoine in France which was founded in 1095 and by 15th century possessed 370 hospitals all over Europe and England. Paris in the 15th century had more than 60 hospitals for



Rev. Prof. Dr. Dietrich Werner, from Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Northern Germany, has been the head of the unit in Bread for the World, Berlin, for theological, ecumenical and conceptual work from 2014 - 2023, now retired. He is a former Director of Theological Education Program of the World Council of Churches (ETE 2007-2014); a former Director at Missions Academy of the University of Hamburg.

1,00,000 inhabitants⁸. Thus, Christianity from its founding periods remained aware that

God's promise and rule of mercy is meant for the whole earth (Ps. 24,1), the global inhabited space (the oikumene) and that all of those in need and sick are amongst the "least" which according to (Matth. 25:40) ask for our response.

Thus, inter-church aid and assistance in humanitarian crisis and hospital as well as refugee work have been a structural component of church-life already, for centuries. Later, in the 19th and 20th century, pioneers of early Christian social ethics started networking within the ecumenical movement and formed the Life and Work movement which was particularly made visible also in the Stockholm Conference on Life and Work in 1925, which will be commemorated by the Church of Sweden and its ecumenical partners in 2025.⁹ We cannot

narrate this history of ecumenical diaconia here in more detail except that In 1945 (three years prior to the formation of the WCC!) the Division on Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service (later called CICARWS), was already established in Geneva as part of the "WCC in formation". The new and comprehensive mandate of CICARWS could be stated as follows: "The aim of the division shall be to express the ecumenical solidarity of the churches through mutual aid in order to strengthen them in their life and mission and especially in their service to the world around them (diaconia) and to provide facilities by which the churches may serve men and women in acute human need everywhere, especially orphaned peoples, including refugees of all categories."

Gradually, in the decades after the 60's, ecumenical diakonia work in the ecumenical movement came to be understood as:

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'God, Restore Us in Your Spirit And Renew the Creation'

>>> Contd. from Page 3 Col. 5

Indeed, God is intimate with the creation, experiencing the joys and agonies of all creatures (Rom. 8:19-25). The whole creation is thereby endowed with value and dignity by association with the sacred. It is to be valued as God, who chose to be present within it, values it.

Thus, on the basis of our Christian interpretations of creation, incarnation, and the Spirit, biophysical realities have great moral significance. They are worthy of appropriate care and concern. Material needs are not to be denied or transcended. Contempt for the material or biophysical is a false spirituality. There must be no indifference to hunger, poverty, and disease; human physical well-being matters! Nor should there be any neglect of ecological integrity. While humans need to use other forms of life as resources, we also have responsibilities to use these resources fairly and frugally, to minimize harm to other living things, and to ensure sufficiency for all human communities, present and future. Therefore, wanton pollution, profligate consumption, human-induced extinctions, and excessive differences in economic well-being are sins - all because the God who is Creator, Redeemer,

The moral status of human beings is enhanced by the claim of the Christian church, based on Genesis 1:26-28 that humans are created in the image of God. According to Calvin, in this regard the human person becomes the mirror of God's goodness. Humankind is called upon to reflect God's love, care and concern for the earth and other life forms.

and Spirit, affiliates lovingly with all of creation. As God loves and cares for all creation, so must we express and exercise creation care.

3.2. Creation and Human Responsibility

The moral status of human beings is enhanced by the claim of the Christian church, based on Genesis 1:26-28, that humans are created in the image of God. According to Calvin, in this regard, the human person becomes the mirror of God's goodness. Humankind is called upon to reflect God's love, care and concern for the earth and other life forms. Calvin points out that "God having fashioned the universe as a magnificent theatre of His glory, God placed man (sic) in it last of all, as the privileged spectator. Even in himself, adorned by God with exceptional gifts, man was the most excellent example of God's works. And he was endowed besides, with the capacity to turn his eyes outward and to admire the handiwork of God in others, of His creatures.

To be created in the image of God provides a great honour

- and a great responsibility. However, ideals of stewardship and dominion have often led to practices of dominion and devastation. Human beings have often regarded themselves as masters of the world, taming and domesticating it, doing as they please with its resources. This has characterised an anthropocentric outlook, which has been challenged by many theologians. Andrew Wannback thus points out that "we need to emphasise our responsibilities more than our rights, and accept also the limits of our authority" (italics added).

The image of God also entails social and ecological responsibilities - and here dangerous distortions of the concept have arisen in modern cultures. The image is linked in Genesis 1:26-28 with dominion, which the divine images are called to exercise in relation to all other life-forms. This idea has raised the important question of whether dominion is a license for the destruction of nature or a mandate for its benevolent care and use. While dominion has been interpreted as a divine grant to prey on the rest of

nature without restraints, we regard dominion to mean the entire stewardship of nature.

Osborn points out that we must be careful as to how we choose to understand the word 'command' in Genesis 1. He warns that we must not allow this to mislead us into thinking that God's creative activity is narrowly deterministic. On the contrary, in uttering those commands, God gives permission for creation, 'to be'. The appearance of creation is a glad act of embrace. More positively, the creative words may be regarded as holding out a promise to creation, as offering created beings the gift of a future with God.

Thus, humans are the stewards of everything God has conferred on us by which we are able to help our neighbour, and are required to render account of our stewardship. Moreover, the only right stewardship is that which is tested by the rule of love." The partially reconstituted human life of person-in Calvin's theology- must be a life in loving community.

In describing such a community, Sallie McFague

points out: "We can no longer see ourselves as rulers over nature but must think of ourselves as gardeners, caretakers, mothers and fathers, stewards, trustees, lovers, priests, co-creators and friends of a world that while giving us life and sustenance also depends increasingly on us in order to continue both for itself and for us."

Harvey Sindima argues that "community must be based in a consciousness that all creatures are part of all others, that humans share a common destiny with nature." Gabriel Setiloane who refers to community also echoes this "inclusive of all life (bios): animals, the habitat (the land), and flora, even the elements." The earth should be viewed as one. This implies mutuality and interdependence. What is done to one part of creation affects the rest.

In contrast, humans act in the image of God when they are responsible representatives. We are to "subdue" the earth only to the extent necessary to protect important human interests like nutrition, health, and creativity, and to do so in accord with the values of God's dominion.

To be continued



15th General Assembly Christian Conference of Asia



Strengthen the profile of churches as actors for eco-social transformation

>>> *Contd. from Page 4 Col. 5*

- interchurch aid and mutual assistance;

- involvement in social development work;

- involvement in disaster relief and humanitarian action;

- involvement in human rights work and assistance to migrants and refugees;

- involvement in environmental care and intervention in issues of global climate justice.

The theme of the Uppsala Assembly of the WCC in 1968, "Behold, I Make All Things New" (Rev. 21:5), can be regarded as the beginning of a formal engagement of the ecumenical movement in the development discourse. Serious studies were undertaken to understand the realities of unequal and dependent economic development, for instance in the IMC based global study project "Rapid Social Change" (1955-1961). Uppsala was also the unleashing factor for action programs like CCPD and PCR in the WCC. Several decades of critical involvement in rethinking the term 'development' followed which already during the Nairobi Assembly in 1975 was replaced by the new umbrella concept of a "just, participatory and sustainable society" (JPSS). It paved the way towards a definite break concerning the equation of "development" and "economic growth and modernization".¹⁰ Several regional forms and examples of cooperation for ecumenical diaconia in Asian countries emerged like the collaboration in the Ecumenical Forum on Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia (VLC) which was operated after 1992 with a joint WCC/CCA Liaison Secretary of the Indochina program Dr. Mathews George was involved there.

Both the WCC as the well as the CCA (founded in 1959 as EACC, and renamed in 1973) had been involved not only in social justice and liberation debates on development, but also heavily in the debates on environmental ethics, planetary limits and the search for sustainability since the 70's. Thus, the Rio Conference on environment and development in 1992, which was called Earth Summit, was no surprise to ecumenical actors in Asia as they had been in the fore-front of discussing environmental sustainability since 1974 (Bucharest Conference). This finally paved the way towards the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development from 2015 which informs of the subtitle and focus of this consultation here and which was the first globally agreed strategic framework of 17 goals and 169 sub-targets to define a mutually agreed concept

Diaconia is rooted in a shared practise of hope and prayer.

Therefore, returning to the new, yet ancient language and spirituality of diaconia remains of pivotal importance also for churches today, both in contemporary secularized but also in multi-faith environments for the credibility of the churches witness and service.

of progress and economic advancement for all nations, not to be lived out at the expense of either nature or of one part or region within the human family, but **by respecting the principle "do not leave anybody behind"**.

Interestingly enough, the SDG Agenda has the same subtitle like the WCC – ACT Alliance Document on ecumenical diaconia. The subtitle of the SDG Agenda is "Transforming our world". The title of the Ecumenical Diaconia document from the WCC is "Called to transformation". This brings both documents and agendas close to the essential task of the church, which actually is about to serve the transformation of this world in the perspective of the values of God's Kingdom. **We are all being called to metanoia, which literally means to change the direction, to return or repent, to change gears. The SDG Agenda thus is an urgent call to the whole of humanity to change the very principle and direction of human civilization as we all know that humanity cannot go on with the current model of industrialized and heavily fossil fuel dependent technological civilization. The SDG agenda for which many faith based organizations also gave their input in terms of the conceptual framework and goals is well aware of the fact that we face the triple global crisis in the 21st century.**

3) Bringing churches and agencies together again – the relevance of the international study process on ecumenical Diaconia and the significance of the new, yet ancient semantics of Diaconia

In September 2014 the WCC, ACT Alliance and the LWF held a major common conference in Malawi and decided to start a new common learning process on key issues of "ecumenical Diaconia".¹¹ The goal of that new process was quite ambitious, but also very relevant in the new context as it unfolded the very core significance of the term "ecumenical" in the combination of words in the

conceptual framework of ecumenical diaconia:

- "Ecumenical diaconia" was emphasized to overcome the fragmentation and individualization or parochialization of churches. It stresses the sense of mutual partnership and common belonging among the various actors in church based diaconia;

- "Ecumenical diaconia" also was emphasized in order to avoid the losing of a distinct profile and added value of churches involvement in both development work, humanitarian assistance as well as environmental diaconia;

- "Ecumenical Diaconia" was intended to build more bridges between churches and agencies in order to avoid the falling apart of local churches and professional agencies in the area of organized Christian social witness;

- The key message was that a strong relationship needs to be built or rebuilt again between churches and specialized ministries in order to express a visible commitment of churches for peace, justice and sustainability in societies.

As a result of this process in 2022 - during the WCC assembly - the key study document was published under the title "Called to Transformation - Ecumenical Diaconia".¹² This Ecumenical Diaconia study document - after the 1961 New Delhi report on "Service" (the third section of the assembly report) - can be seen as the first comprehensive and foundational theological study document on diaconia for the level of World Christianity since decades.

The added value and significance of this study paper of WCC and ACT Alliance can be seen as three fold

- **First** it was emphasized again: *Involvement in diaconia belongs to the essence of the church, it's very being. There can be no separation between mission, unity and diaconia. There is no ecumenical movement without the "service" dimension, i.e. the*

dimension of diaconia.

- **Secondly, there are different social forms of diaconia, but only one common biblical language of diaconia.**

"Diaconia" serves as a publicly known brand name mainly in some western European as well as Scandinavian (and Latin American) churches. Other churches use different terminologies to refer to the phenomenon of social presence of Christian faith (like integral mission, social service, philanthropy). But this should not hinder the churches to affirm that there are common and ancient roots of all Christian traditions to refer to their social witness by using a semantic family of words which are all rooted in some derivatives of *diakonein* (i.e. *being sent for visible social service, social assistance and mediation*).

- **Thirdly, we are reminded again: The involvement in diaconia relates to the credibility and attractiveness of the church.** The early church already grew rapidly in the Mediterranean world as it was socially and culturally attractive how the church practised a culture of communication honouring the dignity of people, building bridges to widows, how they treated children, how they dealt with the bereaved ones and with persons dying. **The specific diaconal language, the language of care, of compassion, of love, of counselling and of sensitivity to suffering remains indispensable both in the past and today. In the specific diaconal language always the three concepts of dignity (in the image of God), justice (for the marginalized) and stewardship (for suffering creation) are interrelated and always play a role.** This Biblical language cannot be easily replaced with the secular language of development. It stands for the fact that in human encounters and medical intervention by committed Christians there is always more than just medical treatment by prescribed drugs. Being engaged in diaconia always has a spiritual

dimension, it touches the heart and the body. **Diaconia is rooted in a shared practise of hope and prayer. Therefore, returning to the new, yet ancient language and spirituality of diaconia remains of pivotal importance also for churches today, both in contemporary secularized but also in multi-faith environments for the credibility of the churches witness and service.**

The ancient narratives of diaconal service which are uniquely interwoven with the narratives of preaching and proclamation as the other ministry dimension of the church (see in the biblical Book of Acts) remain significant and important for the identity and relevance of the global church.

References:

⁷ See for the wider history of the term ecumenical diaconia: Dietrich Werner and Matthew Ross, Terminologies, Learning Processes and Recent Development in Ecumenical Diaconia, in: International Handbook on Ecumenical Diaconia, Regnum Books, Oxford 2021, p. 8-25

⁸ See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hospital_Brothers_of_Saint_Anthony

⁹ It is remarkable to note various important new development in different western countries in this regard all in the same period leading to new foundations and networks both for diaconia and Christian social thinking: 1889 Christian Social Union in England; 1887 Association protestante pour l'étude pratique des questions sociales in France; 1890 Protestant Social Congress in Germany; 1907 Walter Rauschenbusch's major and profound publication: The Social Gospel, which was reprinted in 23 editions!; 1908 Social Creed of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America; 1914 World Alliance for Friendship through the Churches Konstanz (Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze); 1924 Birmingham: the famous Conference on Christian Politics, Economics and Citizenship (COPEC) which published 12 massive volumes on pioneering Christian social thinking; finally as a culminating event 1925 the First World Conference of Life and Work in Stockholm, which founded this crucial second wing of the early pre-institutional ecumenical movement. See on the history: Rouse, Ruth and Neill, Stephen Charles: History of the Ecumenical Movement, Vol I, 1517-1948, WCC Geneva, 2004

¹⁰ See also for the involvement of ACT Alliance in the development discourse: Statement Our Understanding of Development 2008: <https://actalliance.org/documents/our-understanding-of-development/>; or ACT Alliance New Strategy: https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/EN_act-strategy-2019-26_web-3.pdf

¹¹ See: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/church-organizations-explore-ways-of-strengthening-relationships>

¹² See: <https://actalliance.org/act-news/diaconia/>; https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Called-to-Transformation-Ecumenical-Diaconia_web-Low-Res.pdf

- "Ecumenical diaconia" was emphasized to overcome the fragmentation and individualization or parochialization of churches. It stresses the sense of mutual partnership and common belonging among the various actors in church based diaconia;

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To be continued



World Communion
of Reformed Churches

Decade for Climate Justice

Deepen the understanding of the interconnections between economics, ecology, and theology

"We might be aware that wealthy nations and sectors are mainly responsible for historical green house gas emissions. But it is important to note that the wealthy contribute disproportionately to the climate crisis not only through their high-consumption lifestyles but also and especially as investors and wealth holders who own, control, shape, and financially profit from carbon-intensive production processes,"

>>> **Contd. from Page 1 Col. 4**

interwoven aspects of the production and reproduction of life. Every economic system brings a theological or religious understanding of human beings and society. The same can be said about ecology. Then, deepening the mutually critical correlation between economic models and their impact on human subjectivity and spirituality is necessary," noted the statement.

"In this time of grave emergency, Christian churches are called to imagine a new economy that privileges the life of the whole household based on a theology of enough. A theology of enough compels us to reconceive practices of household economics from the



Participants in the Consultation

perspective of the most vulnerable within the household instead of the lord, thereby subverting colonial and patriarchal practices. This would ensure that the integrity of the whole household will be

sustained now and into the future. In the context of climate change this means just transitions to renewable energy, calling to account the insatiable greed of the economy of the Capitalocene, recognizing, confessing, and owning our complicity within the web of structural sin and accompanying with love communities who are already experiencing the grim reality of leaving and losing home," said the statement.

– WCRC News

In the next issue

Excerpts from
the Statement brought out
by the Consultation

A begging flower in the rain

Needhi

Huge appreciation to a member of the Government Bonded Labour Vigilance Committee who serves on the lines of the famous patriotic Tamil poet Bharatiyar, "Giving education to poor children ushers in much more boons and blessings than thousands of food-offering inns and erecting ten thousand temples".

When the tribal couple approached Justin Antony for help to buy clothes for their 5-year-old daughter to go to school, he bought clothes for the girl and her parents. A few days later, the couple informed him that their daughter had been enrolled in school.

Recently, Antony observed a girl of around 5 years walking around with her parents during heavy rains and the girl was begging. The same child! Same parents! Their job is to repair umbrellas.

Though their reply, "The child has no food to go to school" was unacceptable, Justin Antony tried to take the girl to school after giving her food, but the tribal parents refused and said they would send her to school, the next day.

Antony was shocked when the intolerable information came to light. This girl does not go to school, she begs and the money is used by her parents for alcohol.

The next day, again, he asked the parents to send her to school, but no proper answer from them, and wanted to simply prolong their ready-made reply, "Tomorrow". Saddened by this, Antony



Mr. Justin Antony with the child and her parents

straightaway went to the school and enquired. "She is a good student and now she doesn't come to school," said the teachers.

Antony spoke to the couple again and got the ready-made reply. He faced a tough struggle. He called the teachers and finally handed her over to them. Brightness on the girl's face! Mercy Karunya is studying grade in 1 in the Government Primary School, Ezhudesapatru, Munchirai Block in Killiyoor Taluk, Kanyakumari District, Tamilnadu.

Antony's service for the children is not new. He has received several awards and appreciation from 2 Presidents of India twice, 5 Governors 8 times, 5 Collectors 5 times, etc for his IAS awareness classes and self-confidence-building seminars for students from marginalised communities.

Mr. Antony made efforts to raise awareness against child labour through his books, in Tamil and English. His articles on globally accepted values have been published in national and international journals. He was invited by UNESCO to present his innovative concept, the Knowledge Olympiad, a modern way of testing the general knowledge of the students in a wider circle.

Mr. Antony is a motivational speaker. The 72-hour-longest motivational theatrical performance he co-ordinated has entered the Guinness Book of World Records. His speech at the UN Conference Against Corruption in the presence of world leaders and his speech at the UN's Nelson Mandela Day were recorded and broadcasted widely.

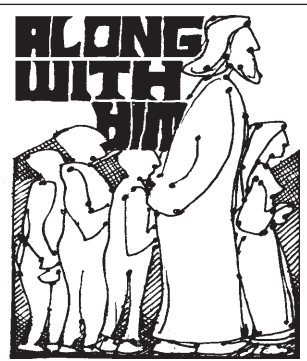
Justin Antony brings back to our thinking the thought-provoking lines

"If your plan is for one year, plant rice.

If your plan is for ten years, plant trees,

If your plan is for one hundred years, educate children".

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Mammen Varkey

"When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs."He said to him the third time "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" (This he said to show by what death he was to glorify God.) And after this he said to him, "Follow me." " John 21: 15-19.

Before we conclude our deep reflection on the 'Inauguration of a New Way', we have to re-iterate that what is essentially, unavoidably, needed is a radical re-understanding of the 'Kingdom of God' revealed to us by the Risen Christ. Only a few non-negligible, critically important aspects are shared here.

1. The Risen Lord is one who walks

"After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he revealed himself in this way.

Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said to him, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "we will go with you." They went out and got into the boat; but that night they caught nothing." John 21: 1-3 (RSV). The seven disciples who went for fishing had known well that their Master had conquered death and risen. "On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of Jews, Jesus came and stood among

them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any," John 20:19-23 (RSV). So the seven disciples who went for fishing, even after receiving the 'Holy Spirit', had seen with their own eyes their Risen Master, but they, could not identify, for quite some time, their Master, who stood on the beach of the Sea of Tiberias. The reasons are very simple and clear. They had not expected the Risen Christ in Galilee. They thought, rather they hoped, that the Risen Christ after conquering death, would be in Jerusalem, and would be on his endeavours for establishing the 'Kingdom' and for ascending 'the throne'! Again, the disciples, including even the most prominent among the specially chosen twelve, could not have believed that the Risen Lord would be without a

'halo' and would be in an ordinary human being's dress! For us, where there is the presence, and the leading, of the Risen Master, there is the 'Kingdom of God'. So, the Risen Master who stood on the beach of the Sea of Tiberias, and confronted his chosen disciples, is also calling us to rise above the, common understanding of the 'kingdom of God' as a state where 'God', the 'Loving Parent' is on the throne!

2. The Risen Lord is one who prepares breakfast

The disciples, including the two most prominent disciples, John and Peter, must have been indescribably surprised to see the Risen Master as one who was hungry and as one who prepared and offered breakfast to the hungry! This incident must definitely speak to us. And all those who try to 'follow' this Risen Master cannot escape from receiving his call, shared with his disciples of all times. Very briefly shared, it reveals that the Risen Master is unavoidably concerned with the hungry. If the

Risen Master was acting as a part of his efforts for the establishment of the 'Kingdom of God', it undeniably reveals that the 'Reign of the Father/ the 'Kingdom of God' is concerned with the human hunger. There is a very important point to be noted here. The hungry have to be fed first. But our mission cannot be stopped at that level; we have to be deeply concerned with the system that causes inequality, hunger, injustice, Jesus himself said. '....when he comes he will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.'

Some people are very purposely, shrewdly creating systems where inequality, hunger, ... are created and are acting fully opposed to the values of the 'Kingdom of the Loving Father'. We are called to realize this, stand up against it and work for the establishment of the 'Kingdom of the Parent God of Love'.

To be continued

LAMP UNTO THE FEET, LIGHT UNTO THE PATH

Let Us Be Compassionate As Our Heavenly Father

A. V. Itty

Luke 6:32-38

"Be merciful as your Father is merciful" (v.36).

We may be interested in loving those who love us and do good to us. May be, we would be ready to help the poor who may be familiar to us. But, will we love and do the same goodness that we do to our friends, to any enemy of ours? To do that, we need to have divine love within us. Then only we shall be eligible to be called the children of the Most High! Children have the responsibility to reflect the character of their parents. What is the character of our heavenly parent? He is kind and merciful to the good and the wicked alike. He radiates sunshine over everyone and showers rain on all! (Mt. 5:45). In the Scripture portion that we meditate upon, Jesus is pinpointing the compassion of our Heavenly Parent!

The Word took flesh and was born as a human to reveal

to the humans what the true nature of God is! The greatest character trait Jesus revealed during His earthly life was the mercifulness or compassion! There is a scene in the film Mary, the Magdalene, where she describes the character of Jesus. She says that, more than the divine power of Jesus, it was His divine compassion that attracted her to Him! When Peter cut away the ear of the servant of the High Priest, who came to



arrest Him, Jesus was compassionate enough to heal him, then and there! He showed His compassion by sincerely forgiving all those who crucified Him!

God treats us just the same way we treat others, particularly our enemies! If we forgive, God would forgive us. Since God has forgiven us our sins when we were sinners, He has shown His mercifulness to us. Hence, we too are bound to show the same



Prof. A. V. Itty, former Professor of English at Bishop Moore College, Mavelikara, is, now, engaged in the Evangelical, and Educational Ministry undertaken by ADORE in the Rayagada Dist. of Odisha. 94950 17850 (Mob)

mercifulness and forgiveness to others, especially to our enemies!

Let us be compassionate enough to forgive even our enemies. May God help.

Food For Thought:

As is the parent, so should be the children!



TONS
of
GLUT
make you a
GLUTTON!

One Ultimate Sacrifice

Suka Joshua



One dead fly
Outweighs all wisdom
Sends aloft all honour
Pilfers all spice
Swindles all pleasance

One bite of the apple
Negated entry into gate
Once and for all
Poor Adam and Eve
Teased by limbless reptile

One fond look
Back at what was left
Left Lot wifeless
The nameless dame
Turned lifeless too

One froward dead
Denied Moses his dream
He struck the stone
Got stuck for he did
Contrary to what He said

The one secret revealed
His perspicuous revelation
Preyed by sedative hug
Left bold Samson bald
Blind even before blinded

The one deadly sin
That gave Judas his rope
Caught them in a trap
Alas! Ananias and Sapphira
Dropped down dead

By one Ultimate Sacrifice
My Jesus paid my price
Ransomed me by grace
The torn curtain drew the curtain
And none can my 'sentence' speak!

As an act of utmost allegiance
My beholden soul beheld
The bereaved kindred
And renewed in reverential awe
The vows to serve with love



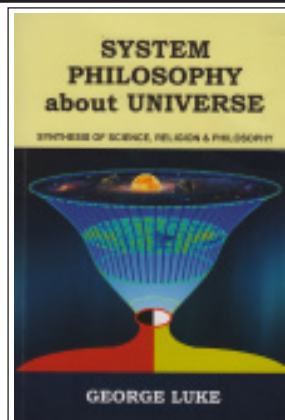
Dr. Suka Joshua,

was Associate Professor of English, at Lady Doak College, Madurai.
She pastors a village church.
She is passionate about girls' education and women empowerment,
and uses the Gospel to enlighten people

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CHEER CHAT

I slept and dreamt that
Life was Joy.
I awoke and saw that
Life was Service.
I acted and beheld
SERVICE was **JOY!**

– Rabindranath Tagore



In the context of the ongoing war in the land of the Holy-One, which side do you support?

Raj Bharath Patta

My faith calls me to stand for justice,
My inter-faith involvement invites me to strive for peace,
My humanity calls for an urgent release of the humanitarian aid to reach people in need,
My Bible-reading calls me to resist misusing the texts in sanctioning violence,
My prayer inspires me to advocate for the rights of the vulnerable.

When nearly 9000 people are killed in this brutal war,
Which side do I support?

When civilians, hospitals and places of worship, churches are attacked,
Which side do I support?

When one million people have to be displaced from their homes,
Which side do I support?

When only crumbs of humanitarian aid have reached the affected,
Which side do I support?

When truck load of food, fuel, medicines and essentials are blocked at the borders,
Which side do I support?

When biblical texts are used, misused and abused blaming the 'other' as people of darkness,
Which side do I support?

When powers use 'just-war' theories to justify their violence on the vulnerable,
Which side do I support?

When people are living in the fear of the bombshells,
Which side do I support?

When people are mourning the death of their dear ones,
Which side do I support?

When the heart-broken people are calling their faith
Which side do I support?



Rev. Dr. Raj Bharath Patta, a Lutheran minister from AELC, is currently serving as a Minister of the Methodist Church at the United Stockport Circuit in UK.

leaders to stop praying for them,

Which side do I support?

When international diplomacy is failing for a cease fire,
Which side do I support?

My faith calls me to stand for justice,
Which side do I support?

My inter-faith involvement invites me to strive for peace,
Which side do I support?

My humanity calls for an urgent release of the humanitarian aid to reach people in need,
Which side do I support?

My Bible-reading calls me to resist misusing the texts in sanctioning violence,
Which side do I support?

My prayer inspires me to advocate for the rights of the vulnerable.

My spirituality resists hatred of all forms on all sides for love alone thrives.

My politics calls for a total ceasefire and to stop the war.

My God weeps with me and works with me for the cause of love, peace and justice.

For I support and stand with the weak, the oppressed, the powerless, the vulnerable.

For I support and stand for the safety and security of life.

For I support and stand for just-peace & I stand for life and love.

Stop war,
seek peace
and save life.

People's Reporter

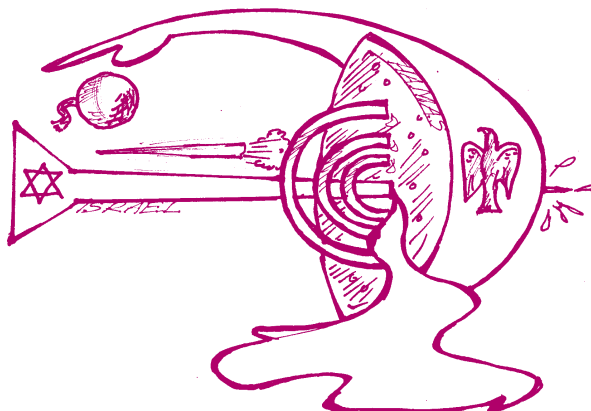
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